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REGIONAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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Argentina: Changes in the Human Rights Situation

The government reportedly has recently made a number of changes in its countersubversive campaign that appear to be aimed at lessening human rights abuses and hastening the judicial resolution of some subversive cases. Nevertheless, the day-to-day fight against subversion reportedly still involves serious violations of human rights. Several recent "disappearances" are evidence of what appears to be an increasing use of violence and illegal counterterrorist techniques by small groups within the military and security forces, apparently for internal political purposes. Such activity is more a reflection of the regime's inability to control hard liners in the military than an indication that the government condones the use of these techniques.

The government has already taken steps to reduce blatant human rights abuses and to lessen the enormous margin for error tolerated in the official fight against terrorism. More cases are being turned over to military and civilian tribunals, thus reducing the number of detainees in executive custody under state-of-seige provisions. This change marks only the increased use of the judicial system, however, and will not necessarily result in improved prisoner conditions. Seriously compromised terrorists continue to be treated harshly and systematically eliminated.

As a result of the significantly reduced capability of the terrorist organization, the government is treating with special considerations, including reduced sentences, those arrested who are only marginally affiliated with subversives. Some detainees have been released, and others have been authorized to leave the country. The government also has published lists of those released and tried. According to US Embassy sources, a centralized computer information retrieval system and new requirements for multiple prior clearances on suspected subversives have reduced the chances of "mistakes."

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The government is taking advantage of the reduced terrorist threat to assert more control over and to compartment further the anti-subversive activities of its forces. As the war against terrorism ebbs, however, the abuses and violence that are a part of inter- and intra-service rivalry, including schemes by some officials to discredit others, are becoming more apparent.

The unsolved abduction of the Argentine Ambassador to Venezuela, the disappearances, among others, of a prominent labor leader in February and a number of lawyers more recently, probably are more attributable to internal high-level politics than a result of the war against subversion. The backgrounds of most of the victims offer little information to connect them with terrorism.

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